

AA BEGINS AT HOME

In April eighty-seven General Service Delegates representing AA's thousands of groups in the United States and Canada gather in New York for the annual General Service Conference. This is the fifteenth such Conference and the tenth since the occasion at St. Louis in 1955 when Bill turned over to the Conference responsibility for AA's present conduct and future growth. The author of this article, not a delegate, was asked by the Grapevine to give an impression of last year's Conference sessions for our readers.

AS the date for the 1965 GSO Conference approaches, I am filled with memories of a day spent as an observer at last year's conference. I was not directly involved in the business of the day, and so could sit quietly, listen and soak up like a contented sponge a variety of scattered but precious impressions. Most important perhaps was the realization that one can be 'at home' in AA anywhere in the world and yet AA, like charity, begins at home.

How often a scared or reluctant newcomer comments with surprise and relief that he felt at home at his first meeting. I, for one, felt that way without at all understanding why. In the Grapevine report to the delegates of the conference, Don G. said that the magazine's hope — its policy — is to try to make the alcoholic feel at home as he reads its stories. Delegates from all over the world

obviously felt at home together at this gathering in New York. And I was reminded of the feeling of belonging I have had whenever I have attended a meeting in Indiana or Florida or Massachusetts, away from my own group.

At the conference, delegates with many accents were speaking a common language, what Bill W. has so rightly called "the language of the heart." There is, one of the trustees pointed out, a word for 'drunk' in every language. But the need for translations of AA literature so that all facets of the healing message can be carried to all nations was repeatedly stressed. The delegate from Puerto Rico asked if there might be a Spanish edition of the Grapevine. The delegate from Finland said that a magazine modeled on the Grapevine is already being published in Finnish. The delegate from South

Africa reported an important beginning being made on the translation of our literature into Afrikaans and Zulu. Hazel R. of the General Service Office told us that two translators were working full time to spread the good news of AA, and that at least some of our material has been translated into French, German, Italian, Flemish, Polish, Swedish, Norwegian, Portuguese, Hungarian, Bantu and Isixhosa.

So I saw how our Fellowship is reaching around the globe, across cultural, geographical and political barriers. I saw too how diversified are the skills we can muster once we are sober enough to utilize and develop our own potentialities. Here were big-city lawyers and loggers

from the northern woods working together to stay sober and to help other alcoholics achieve sobriety. Here were men and women of many trades and professions (who not so long ago perhaps were unemployed and a drain on society) functioning effectively as breadwinners in their own communities, with time and strength left over to serve in the larger world of our Fellowship.

The speakers kept to the announced schedule. Without exception, they addressed the delegates movingly, clearly and briefly. "The brevity of their talks," commented Herb M. wryly and so truly, "is a testimony to their sobriety." Those who while drinking would rather talk than listen, sat still and listened

attentively to the speakers. Sometimes disagreements arose. But always, as with the delegate from Florida who rose to his feet and said, "I think I can disagree on this point without being disagreeable," there was willingness to live and let live. How many of us could do just that in the arrogant, egotistical, know-it-all days of our drinking?

At the meeting I found myself sitting next to a charming gentleman who had come from England for the conference, and we shared a little of our experience, strength and hope with each other. I lunched with delegates from Illinois and Wisconsin. And because we had so much in common it was as if we were old friends although we were in fact newly met. Always, too, I was conscious of Bill W. sitting among us, saying very little, giving over to our care the Fellowship he and one other alcoholic had set in motion, seeking no credit for himself.

I came away with a glad feeling of being part of something vital and growing, wishing that every member could at some time be immersed in the warmth of a GSO conference. But though for many of us this will never be possible, each of us has a contribution to make within the home groups that are the foundation of AA.

Some years ago, when the United Nations was new, Eleanor Roosevelt came to speak in the high-school auditorium of our little town about that organization, which is dedicated

to hope for all nations as ours is to hope for the suffering individual. She commented on the need for translations to break down language barriers so that U.N. members could better communicate what was in their minds and hearts as they sat around their conference tables. During the question period one earnest housewife asked how she might help the U.N. And Mrs. Roosevelt's answer has stayed with me although it was not until I had taken the First Step in our program that I could take the first step she then recommended. Look into yourself, she said, and make peace with yourself. Try, then, to create an atmosphere of peace for your family and in your neighborhood. When you have done this, branch out into your community, into your state and eventually perhaps into national or international endeavors. But start with yourself; without little reservoirs of peace in each of us peace in the world is not possible.

So, it seems to me, we must begin in AA — with our own sobriety, our own inventory, our own amends. Only then are we ready to be helpful in our home group. Whether or not we ever participate in the Fellowship at a national and international level, the work we do within ourselves and with those alcoholics close to home is a rock upon which AA will continue to build and on which our annual General Service Conferences can continue to flourish.

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